



## Official Opposition • L'opposition officielle

Ontario NDP Caucus • Groupe parlementaire du NPD de l'Ontario

Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Ministry of Education  
5th Floor 438 University Ave  
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Tuesday, July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020

RE: Child care sector needs urgent government funding, consultation to reopen safely.

Dear Honourable Stephen Lecce,

We are writing to you today to inform you of the concerns parents, Registered Early Childhood Educators, child care operators and advocates have expressed to our offices regarding the Ford governments' approach to reopening child care centres during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the governments' announcement calling for the reopening of child care centres across the province, we have heard from many frustrated child care operators and parents who feel the current plan falls short of adequately supporting a safe return to child care in Ontario. To address these concerns, we hosted a child care roundtable on Monday, July 20th. We want to share with you here the key issues raised so that you can take action immediately.

Child care operators expressed concern about the lack of adequate consultation and communication by the province with the child care sector. This has left many operators scrambling to meet unrealistic timelines for reopening, confused about what school reopening will mean for centres, and feeling alone and overwhelmed as they navigate daunting municipal and provincial guidelines.

The lack of adequate communication and consultation with the child care industry has led to inaccurate reporting by the Premier, who on July 17th, 2020 insisted that 91% of child care centres were operational. During our roundtable we were told from several industry stakeholders that only 37% of licensed centres were operating as of July 14, and most of these centers were operating at a limited capacity.

It was also stressed during our roundtable that child care must be included alongside the plans for reopening schools in September. Not only is it unclear how child care centres sharing space with schools will be impacted, many operators stressed that should schools return using a hybrid model, operators will be unable to provide care on the days children are not in school.

This lack of consistent care will severely impact many working parents, particularly women, who will find it difficult or impossible to return to work without affordable child care options. Whether students return to the classroom full-time, part-time or online, it is imperative parents have access to high-quality affordable child care.

Additionally and understandably, child care centres are eating in reserve funds and are in desperate need of additional funding. Many centres cannot afford the necessary renovations to accommodate multiple cohorts, nor can they afford to reopen and just rely on fees from a smaller number of parents. The costs of rehiring staff, implementing new cleaning protocols and purchasing Personal Protective Equipment have been high. In the absence of provincial funding, many child care centres face enormous barriers to welcoming kids back under the new rules for re-opening. Many centres are only open because they remain on the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy Program. When that program ends, many centres will not be able to make ends meet.

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Ontario NDP Caucus Services

Main Legislative Building, Room N200 • Queen's Park • Toronto, ON M7A 1A8 • [ondpcaucus.com](http://ondpcaucus.com)



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Child care centres are caught between child caps, growing waitlists of families in need of child care, and a commitment to hold spots for families not ready to send their children back. It is critical the government step up with support for the child care sector before centres are forced to close permanently or hike fees, and before more parents have to quit their jobs to stay home.

This government must guarantee access to affordable, quality, public child care for all. It is critical for children and the safe reopening of the economy. That's why we are calling on you to:

- Create a plan to maintain access to child care by boosting capacity safely.
- Provide immediate base funding to stabilize the child care sector to prevent fee increases and layoffs.
- Find ways to use available public infrastructure so that schools and child care centres can resume in-person for as many children as possible in a safe and healthy way.
- Engage child care advocates, RECEs and child care operators in reopening planning.
- Guarantee that no essential workers currently receiving emergency child care will lose child care provision when the emergency child care program ends.
- Guarantee that parents will be able to access paid, job-protected leave until school and child care fully resumes.
- Ensure the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy remains available to child care operators by working with the Federal government.

It is our hope this letter serves to help your ministry better prepare and support a safer reopening of child care centres. Should you have any questions, we are available for a meeting to discuss these concerns in greater detail. Please do not hesitate to get in touch.

We look forward to hearing your response to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jessica Bell".

Jessica Bell, MPP University—Rosedale

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doly Begum".

Doly Begum, MPP Scarborough Southwest